

## COMMON MYTHS ABOUT CATS

**The City of Millville** would like to share with you some of the common myths about cats and why they really aren't true. Cats were first domesticated about 10,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent, currently modern-day Iraq. Cats have always been important in agricultural societies for their ability to kill mice, rats, snakes and other pests. In Egypt of the Pharaohs, the goddess Bastet took on a feline form. Some cats wore jewelry, were mummified and buried in tombs similar to people. These animals have long fascinated and attracted humans. A rich mythology has grown up around them.

The folklore around cats varies from place to place. In Great Britain, black cats are seen as lucky and are often given as wedding gifts. However, in most of southern and western Europe and in America, the black cat is a symbol of bad luck, and legends tell of the cat as a common shape-shifter and a witch's familiar. The Puritans who settled in New England brought their beliefs in the evil of black cats to America. Anyone who was found to have such an animal was severely punished and accused of witchcraft, a capital offense.

Because of these misconceptions, shelter workers maintain that it is hardest to find homes for black cats. However, there is no evidence that these cats have a temperament any different than their tabby or calico siblings. They will make good pets.

**Although we may no longer view a cat in terms of good or bad luck, myths about this animal persist.**

- *Cats have nine lives.* Cats only have one life and have not been known to come back from a mortal illness or injury. They need regular wellness care and vaccines.
- *Cats don't need immunizations.* Cats are susceptible to vaccine preventable diseases such as rabies, feline leukemia and feline herpes virus. Speak with your vet about what vaccines your cat should receive.
- *Cats should not wear collars.* In a 2010 study published in the Journal of American Veterinary Medical Society, it was found that most cats do fine with collars and that, comparing elastic, breakaway and conventional buckling collars, the bucking collars showed the fewest reports of loss and mouth and limbs being caught in the collar. A collar and ID tag, along with a microchip, are the best protection against loss of your cat.
- *Cats are independent creatures and low maintenance pets who can take care of themselves.* The fact is that strays and feral cats who live outdoors without human care, have an expected lifespan of three to four years, while 'pampered' pets can live well into their teens, with reports of cats living into their 20's and even their 30's.
- *Cats should have one litter before she is spayed.* Veterinary evidence says the opposite. Cats that have been spayed before their first heat are healthier throughout their lives. Check with your vet about the best time to spay or neuter your cat.
- *Cats always land on their feet.* Although cats, graceful and agile, are often seen twisting in the air, if they fall from a high enough place or in an awkward position, they can land on their backs or their heads and be injured. Even landing on their feet can cause injury if the fall is hard enough.
- *Declawing is like trimming nails.* Actually, declawing is the amputation of the first joint on each toe, a procedure that many see as inhumane mutilation. Declawing is painful and can lead to infection and tissue death. Declawing changes the way a cat's paw meets the ground and can result in back problems for the animal.
- *Cats are unhappy being kept indoors.* Like most animals, cats become used to their lifestyles, and a cat kept indoors from kittenhood can be very happy, healthy and content in the house. Cats need exercise and stimulation. A variety of toys, scratching posts, climbing towers, perches, and interaction with caring humans, keeps them from boredom and destructive behavior.
- *Cats are attracted to milk on a baby's mouth and can suffocate the child.* There are no recorded cases of this happening. A cat may like snuggling up to a sleeping child. Some cats like warmth and human contact, but they will not steal a child's breath.
- *Pregnant women should not have a cat.* It is not the cat who poses a threat to expectant moms, but the litter box, where there may be a microorganism that causes disease. As long as someone else handles and cleans the litter box, there is no danger to mother or baby.

- *Cats should drink cow's milk.* Dairy farms have cats to keep mice out of the grains that feed the cows and are the cats are often depicted as loving fresh milk. The truth is that milk is a very rich food for a small animal. Some cats get diarrhea from milk and too much milk can lead to obesity. This is true of most 'people food'. Cats, like all of your companion animals, do best on the food that is formulated to meet their dietary needs.

Thanks to the International Fund for Animal Welfare for making this information available.

**For more information on the myths and truths about cats, visit**

<http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/cats/tips>

<http://www.aspca.org/blog/debunking-black-cat-myth>

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/cat-care>